

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

March 11, 2005

The Week Ahead

Fri., March 18 – The Commissioner is the keynote speaker at the Metropolitan Social Services Breakfast.

The Journey to National Accreditation

Submitted by Commissioner Viola P. Miller

On March 31, we will kick off the Department of Children's Services journey toward national accreditation. We are currently forming the core Council on Accreditation team, which will lead this effort. We want everyone to have an opportunity to participate if they wish. This journey will be difficult but exciting.

Becoming an agency accredited by the Council on Accreditation for Child and Family Services will be one of our proudest accomplishments. If you have any interest in being on the core team, please contact Brenda B. Bell at Brenda.B.Bell@state.tn.us.

DCS Policy Questions and Answers on the Intranet

Submitted by Mary Hubbert, Policy Development Coordinator

Research and Development's policy section is now connected to the DCS Intranet's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) link, where frequently asked policy questions and answers are posted. The policy link will be updated as often as policy questions that are determined to be important to staff are received and answered. Questions that cannot be answered by R & D will be forwarded to the appropriate staff for an accurate response. The link is <http://www.intranet.state.tn.us/chldserv/faq/Policies/Policy%20FAQs.pdf>. Please visit often!

Bulletin Board

New Level, a collaboration with Family & Children's Service and the Department of Children's Services, will be hosting an informational meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 17, at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, located at 1112 Jefferson St., Nashville. The

public is invited to the meeting, where they will learn more about becoming resource (adoptive or foster) parents. For more information, call (615) 627-0347.

Taft Rocking Chair Donation

Submitted by Carol Muscarnero, Personnel Analyst 2, Taft Youth Development Center

Students in Anna Pendergrass' diversified technology class at Taft Youth Development Center recently built youth rocking chairs. Taft then donated the chairs to the House of Hope located in Crossville, Tenn. The House of Hope is a not for profit organization that provides shelter for children who have been removed a home during a methamphetamine raid. The children remain there until they can be placed in foster care through the Department of Children's Services.



Pictured are Mike Steinmann, of the Cumberland County Sheriffs Department and director of the House of Hope, with Jackie Reece, manager of treatment at Taft Youth Development Center.

Mother of the Year

Becky Rogers was recently named “Mother of the Year” at the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce’s annual meeting. The award recognized the years of parenting and selflessness she and her husband, J.C. Rogers, have dedicated to more than 100 foster and respite children.

The couple has two natural children and seven adopted children. They first began serving as foster parents years ago, when Mrs. Rogers attended an informational meeting to learn about foster parenting.

“We were just half way through the class for foster care when the phone rang one morning when we were on our way to church. The hospital had two little girls, an 18-month-old and a 5-year-old. We completed the paperwork to become foster parents and later adopted the 18-month-old, and the 5-year-old’s father took her back,” she said in an article published on February 24 in *The Daily Post-Athenian*.

Mrs. Rogers describes foster parenting as both immensely fulfilling and heart-wrenching at the same time.

“Caring for foster children has been the hardest thing you can do because you get attached, and then giving them up can be the most difficult thing you can do,” she said.

DCS Computer Deployment in High Gear

Submitted by Eddie Rhodman, Director of Infrastructure Development & Support

The replacement of the State Automated Child Welfare Information System II (SACWIS) computers has been in process for some time. The response has been positive. The Office of Information Systems’ (OIS) deployment team continues to get praised for their professionalism and speed of deployment. The word is that they have it “down to an art,” as one caseworker said. The OIS operates on a four-year computer replacement cycle. Computers four years old or older will be replaced with new Dell systems. Over half of the 4,300 desktops will be replaced this year. To date, 2,427 new computers have been installed.

New computers have been installed in the following locations:

- Woodland Hills
- CPS Central Intake
- Hamilton County region
- Southeast region
- Northeast region
- East region
- Knox region
- Upper Cumberland region
- Mid Cumberland region

- Central Office

The Davidson region will be complete by March 16. The South Central region will be complete by March 17 with 227 desktops; the Northwest region by March 28 with 160 desktops; the Southwest region by April 5 with 282 desktops; and the Shelby region by April 18 with 434 desktops.

Employee Assistance Program Awareness Month

Submitted by Nicole Ramey, Personnel Manager I

March is Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Awareness Month. This emphasis is to acquaint eligible employees of the beneficial services provided by the program. We have a new vendor, Magellan Health Services. Services are the same, but the new phone number to call for assistance is 1-800-308-4934.

We are holding an EAP “De-stressing Your Workplace” contest. To enter, employees should write an account of how they effectively reduce stress within the workplace. Describe the activity or method that has been effective. The winner will be chosen based on creativity and effectiveness of the activity or method. Entries may be submitted individually or as a team, and all entries will become the property of the State Employee Assistance Program. Multiple entries are accepted. Include your name, department and telephone number. Entries should be typewritten on one page (8 ½ x 11), single or double-spaced. Entries may be faxed or mailed to the State EAP Office (615-741-8196) by March 31. The winner will be selected and receive a prize at the EAP Awareness Month awards ceremony in April.

Seminars are scheduled in many locations on “Charting Your Way Through Uncertain Times”, which helps people discover effective strategies to deal with stressors at work and home in order to reduce stress and find a better balance. EAP supervisor training sessions are also offered at various locations. Reservations should be made for events offered by the state by contacting Alisha Smith at (615) 741-8643, (800) 253-9981 or alisha.d.smith@state.tn.us.

For more information on seminars or other services, visit the EAP Web site at <http://www.state.tn.us/finance/ins/eap/eap.html>.

Well-Being Highlight: Survey of Foster Parents

Submitted by Mary Beth Franklyn, TennCare Liaison, Blue Ribbon Committee

A survey shows that foster parents know fundamentals on accessing TennCare services.

TennCare Select sent surveys to foster parents in the Hamilton County and Northwest regions. The survey included questions about visitation by the case manager and basic information about accessing healthcare services.

Of 364 surveys mailed, 79 were returned. This rate is 22 percent higher than most Blue Cross Blue Shield Tennessee, which average a 10-15 percent response rate. Overall, foster parents indicated that the caseworker was visiting, that they know who their primary care provider is, that they have no problem receiving timely services and that they know about early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT).

Nearly 89 percent of survey respondents indicated that their DCS caseworker visited them in the last 30 days. Most (66 percent) said that their caseworker had seen their child 7-10 times in the past year. Many also reported that their caseworker provides them with current information regarding their child's health frequently (36 percent) and often (31 percent).

Some comments from survey respondents follow:

"DCS shows an excellent amount of concern for their children's safety, well-being and education."

"Outstanding caseworker Sandy Banks keeps a close watch on all her children and gets involved on a personal level."

"Everyone provides good service. My children are in good health."

"Terrie Richards always provides excellent support in dealing with child issues and behaviors."

"Our DCS Northeast office has been easy to work with and has answers when I ask, or finds out."

If We Had More, Couldn't We Do More?

Submitted by Kenneth Sanders, Executive Director, Office of Finance and Program Support

Did you know that when the Department of Children's Services was created that one of the major goals in the Children's Plan was to maximize the federal revenues available for child welfare? In 2005, we are still striving to put better systems in place that accurately capture the documentation needed to claim those funds. It begins with the information collected by our caseworkers; it is compiled within our information systems, and then is extrapolated and formatted to the funding formulas in accordance with federal guidelines. Every single one of us has an important role in earning our federal dollars.

During the past several months, I have seen steady progress in our efforts to claim more federal dollars for eligible services rendered by DCS. An example is the DCS Foster Care Title IV-E Penetration Ratio. In 2004 it was 43 percent. Now it is 52 percent. That nine percent increase is very commendable, and we are definitely starting to move in the right direction.

I have sometimes sensed that our quest for additional revenues is being viewed as bureaucratic greed rather than an essential part of our responsibilities to our children and families. In discussing this with some caseworkers recently, they commented, “Well, money is not our concern; our job is to think of the children.” That is true, we do need to think of the children. They are the essence of everything we do at DCS. However, when graciously considering our kids, don’t we need to think beyond the current box we’re apparently in? Shouldn’t we also consider the things we could be doing better, if we had more resources? Shouldn’t kids in DCS custody in Tennessee get their fair share of the federal funds available to them? Whose job is that? **Answer:** It is a team effort in which we must all play our parts.

There are several examples of revenue maximization solutions that should already be included in our regular daily job responsibilities. For example, more TennCare funds can be claimed if we submit better case documentation for face-to-face visits (Our goal is 90 percent). More Title IV-E foster care funds can be claimed if we obtain new court orders in a timely fashion (Our goal should be 99.9 percent). More federal funds can be claimed if we report what we are doing in relation to our casework responsibilities in our random moment sampling inquiries (A special new training focus has been placed on this matter). More funds can be claimed if we increase our Title IV-E adoption assistance penetration rates (Our target is 80 percent). Our DCS foster home Title IV-E penetration rate should be no less than 65 percent, and our DCS residential rate should be no less than 55 percent.

Probably the biggest new initiative launched this year is the Tennessee Universities Training Consortium. This initiative is designed to produce a consistent curriculum of top quality social welfare training at universities in close proximity to our employees’ homes, as well as enhanced in-service training for our seasoned staff members. This should also result in facilitating the use of our current state training dollars for matching new Title IV-E training dollars. Now that’s a win/win situation I can get excited about.

In the grand regional fiscal review sessions that are in progress right now, your regional leadership folks are receiving specific information about your region’s comparative changes in all of these areas. Our budget staff and our revenue maximization staff will continue to work with you and your regional leadership, to enable you to improve these figures during the last quarter of this fiscal year.

We have made progress, and we rightfully celebrate that. We do have room for improvement, and that improvement is very attainable with a better understanding of what we need to do. The caseworkers I spoke of, in the third paragraph, were right in focusing on the needs of the children within their current resource capabilities. However,

not one of them would refuse more resources to help the children and families that the Department of Children's Services was created to serve.

Core Leadership

CORE Leadership Meeting Brenda Bell, Presiding March 8, 2005

TNKids Release 05/05

The 05/05 TNKids release has been significantly impacted by the amount of work on E-Biz and the FHACP. The Notice of Action will stay in the 05/05 release. Michael Price will e-mail the priority list to the Core Leadership Team monthly. Prices stressed the importance of training staff before releases are sent to the field. He will have a meeting with select CLT members to discuss promises made to the Technical Assistance Committee and Children's Rights, Inc., including medication tracking and placements. He will also look at enhancing the Web application.

Path to Excellence (P2E) Team Organizer Reports

Eric Henderson distributed the Path to Excellence progress reporting schedule to the CLT. When goals are completed, they will be removed from the report. The reporting schedule follows:

- April 6 - Interim progress report
- July 29 – Quarterly progress report
- December 9 – Annual progress report

Needs Assessment Implementation Plan

Elizabeth Black distributed material on the needs assessment.

Six Uniform Strategies for all Regional Implementation Plans

The six uniform strategies for all regional implementation plans include the following:

- Leadership and Management
- Resource Home Recruitment, Retention and Support
- Child and Family Team Meeting
- Child Protective Services
- Permanency Backlog Review Placement Process
- One Worker/One Child Model

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

Daryl Chansuthus presented the model of what we use to develop the performance-based contract, through which the Department will contract with a number of sources for a variety of services and develop performance based contracting. Program monitoring and evaluation will examine how funds are spent; analyze outcomes and monitor fiscal and program performance.

Upper Cumberland Regional Implementation Plan

Shalonda Cawthon distributed the Upper Cumberland regional implementation plan to the CLT. Issues addressed in the plan included length of stay, number of children placed out of home county and the re-entry rate of children coming back into custody. Goals include enhanced recruitment and retention, through which more Hispanic and African-American resource families are acquired and faith-based recruitment is actively engaged.



They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself. – Andy Warhol

It isn't where you came from; it's where you're going that counts.
– Ella Fitzgerald